

MY FIRST AND LAST SIGHT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

There is no more vivid or apparently indelible impression on the tablet of my memory than my first and last sight of President Lincoln ; and the circumstances connected therewith are equally well remembered. The first occasion was when he called on President Buchanan, in company with Senator Seward, on the 23d of February, 1861, and the last was when he excused himself from making a speech at the Executive Mansion on the evening of April 10, 1865, the next day after Lee's surrender.

It is generally known that Mr. Lincoln arrived in Washington, unannounced, several hours before he was expected by the public at large. It was supposed that he would rest at Harrisburg over night, and probably not more than three or four persons were cognizant of his intention to come directly through without stopping. Indeed, it was stated at the time that he kept this intention entirely to himself, but it was doubtless known to his traveling companions, Mr. Lammon, afterward Marshal of the District of Columbia, and Mr. E. J. Allen, as well as to Senator Seward. None of the railroad officials on the train, either from Harrisburg to Baltimore, or from Baltimore to Washington, knew he was on board. Great preparations for his reception had been made, both at Baltimore and Washington ; and as late as eleven o'clock, after his arrival, in the morning of the 23d, active preparations were in progress to send the contemplated extra train for him to Baltimore. Shortly before six o'clock of that morning, somewhat to the wonder of the few around at that early hour, Senator Seward was seen waiting at Willard's Hotel, where rooms had been quietly engaged for Mr. Lincoln the previous day. He had not long to wait before Mr. Lincoln arrived, and was immediately escorted to his rooms by Mr. Seward, who left him alone for rest. At nine o'clock A.M., Mr. Lincoln received his breakfast in his private parlor, and his presence was so little known in the city that it was one o'clock in the afternoon before any callers came to see him.

About eleven in the morning, in company with Mr. Seward, Mr. Lincoln went to pay his respects to the President. There was a special meeting of the Cabinet that forenoon, and it was in session when the door-keeper came in and handed the President a card. With a look of pleasant surprise, Mr. Buchanan said, " Uncle Abe is down-stairs ! " and immediately

went to meet him in the red room.* In the course of fifteen or twenty minutes he returned with Mr. Lincoln and Governor Seward, who were presented to the members of the Cabinet, and after a few minutes' conversation of no special importance, the visitors left to call on General Scott. Although I was living in Washington while Mr. Lincoln was a member of Congress, I had no recollection of having ever seen him before. I was at once struck by his tall, lank figure, towering, as it did, almost head and shoulders above Senator Seward, and even overtopping President Buchanan, as they entered the room. I was equally impressed, also, by his quiet, unaffected manner and placid disposition. I did not observe in him the least sign of nervousness or deep concern; and there is good reason to believe that, "with malice towards none, with charity for all," he felt confident of being able to gain the good-will of the Southern malcontents and of soon bringing the seceding States back to their proper relations in the Federal Government. The Peace Convention was then in session, and hopes of an amicable settlement had not yet been abandoned. But, alas! alas!! Instead of allowing wisdom to assert its control, the madness of folly bore sway, and for four long years the country was deluged in blood!

The news of Lee's surrender was received at the War Department just before nine o'clock Sunday evening, the 9th of April, 1865, and ere the dawn of day the citizens were awakened by the sound of cannon proclaiming the joyful tidings. Soon crowds of people, accompanied by bands of music, passed through the streets, singing the "Star-Spangled Banner," "Rally Round the Flag, Boys," and other patriotic songs. The courts met and adjourned, and nearly all business was suspended. The clerks in the various offices were dismissed for the day, and hundreds of them, augmented by throngs of other citizens, gathered on the south steps and sidewalk of the Interior Department, and unitedly raised their voices to the grand old tune of "Old Hundred" in singing

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Never in my life had I heard those words sound so sweetly or seem to touch the heart so tenderly. I was on my way to the Post Office Department, where I found Postmaster-General Dennison in the main hall of the second story making a congratulatory address to a crowd assembled around him. About ten o'clock, a line, composed of nearly two thousand persons, mostly from the Navy Yard and vicinity, and constantly increasing, passed

*[The writer of this article was one of the members of President Buchanan's Cabinet at the time.—EDITOR.]

along Pennsylvania Avenue, headed by the Marine Band, and with two small howitzers in the rear, which were fired at intervals. On reaching the White House, after several airs by the band, loud calls were made for the President, when he shortly appeared at a front chamber window, and was greeted with hearty cheering. The band now struck up the stirring tune, "America," and was joined vocally in the words,

"My country, 'tis of thee I sing,"

by the assembled multitude. It was some minutes before order was restored, when, after a moment's stillness, Mr. Lincoln said :

"I am greatly rejoiced, my friends, that an occasion has occurred on which the people cannot restrain themselves. I suppose arrangements are being made to appropriately celebrate this glorious event this evening or to-morrow evening. I will have nothing to say then, if it is all dribbled out of me now. I see you have a band. I propose having this interview closed by the band performing a patriotic tune, which I will name. Before this is done, however, I wish to mention one or two little circumstances connected with it. I have always thought that '*Dixie*' was one of the best tunes I had ever heard. Our adversaries over the way, I know, have attempted to appropriate it. [Applause.] I referred the question to the Attorney-General, and he gives it as his legal opinion that it is now our property. [Laughter and applause.] I now ask the band to favor us with its performance."

The band responded most heartily, to the delight of all present, and the crowd proceeded to call on Secretary Stanton, who declined speaking on the plea of ill health. He, however, introduced General Halleck, who said :

"Always ready as I am to obey the orders of my superior officer, the Hon. Secretary of War, I hardly think he will go so far as to require me to become a stump-speaker. [Laughter, cheers, and cries, 'The people require it; it is a military necessity.'] Stump-speaking, my friends, is something in which I have never indulged. I can only say that our congratulations and thanks are due to General Grant and our brave generals and soldiers, in the field, for the great victory announced this morning, and for the blessing of peace, of which it is the harbinger." [Applause.]

Secretary Welles was next called on at his house, when he appeared and merely bowed his thanks for the honor. About five o'clock in the afternoon, several hundred persons assembled in and around the portico of the White House in expectation of a speech from the President. After repeated calls, Mr. Lincoln appeared at the centre window over the front

door, and, as soon as the cheering with which he was received ceased, he spoke substantially as follows :

"I appear, my friends, in response to your call, for the purpose of saying that if the present company have assembled by appointment, there is some mistake. More or less people have been gathered all day, and in the exuberance of good feeling—all of which was greatly justifiable—have called on me to say something. I have said what was proper to be said for the present. Some mistake has crept into the understanding, if you think a meeting was appointed for this evening. [Voices: 'We want to hear you now.'] I have appeared before larger audiences than the present during the day, and have said to them what I now desire to repeat. With reference to the great good news, I suppose there is to be some further demonstration, and perhaps to-morrow would suit me better than now, as in that case I should be better prepared. I would therefore say that I am willing, and hope to be ready, to say something then. [Applause.] Occupying the position I do, I think I ought to be particular, as all I say gets into print. A mistake hurts you and the country, and I try not to make mistakes. [A voice: 'You have never made any.'] If agreeable to have a general demonstration to-morrow evening, I will try and say something, in which, at least, I shall be careful to avoid making any mistakes."

Thanking those present for the call, the President bade them good-night, and retired amid the cheers of the assemblage. I never saw him again. Throughout this brief address his face wore a benignant and satisfied expression, which told plainly of the unspeakable relief the surrender of Lee had brought to him. I could but remark the great change from his usually sad look to one, I might say, almost angelic; and I am fortunate to possess his photograph taken while in this happy state of mind at that time. He delivered his contemplated speech to an immense crowd on the following evening—his last public address on earth.

Horatio King

